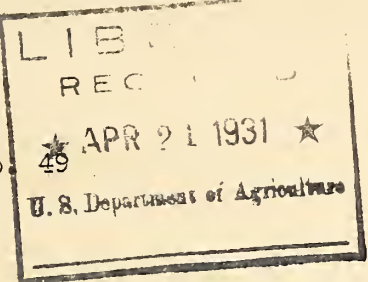


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April 6, 1931



A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the eastern district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, broadcast Monday mornings at 10 A.M., through WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations.

Good morning, my radio friends. Your government representative comes to you again to tell you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded through the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act, and to tell you how to read labels, in order that you may become careful, discriminating, exacting, and economical buyers.

The Federal food and drugs act prohibits false and fraudulent statements of curative values on the labels of drug preparations. Under the authority of this provision of the act, your Federal food and drug administration in the past several years has caused the removal of false representations from the labels of dentifrice preparations.

Here is one instance of the enforcement of this provision of the act as it applies to dentifrices. One interstate shipment, comprising 12,000 dozen tubes of toothpaste was found to be labeled as an "adjunct in the treatment of pyorrhea, and pus discharging gums, which cause loose teeth." The labels also bore statements to the effect that the toothpaste would "protect teeth from acids which cause decay and also would make bleeding gums firm, strong, and sound." Now, my friends, there are no drugs nor combinations of drugs known to science which will, of themselves, perform the services and produce the effects which the label on this particular product promised to its users. We made a chemical analysis of a sample from this particular shipment of 12,000 dozen tubes of toothpaste. The analysis showed that its composition was not greatly different from the usual composition of such products. Therefore, we knew that there was nothing in the toothpaste which would give it any especially beneficial effect in combatting any of the mouth conditions to which the label referred. Indeed, the product was essentially worthless for any purpose, except as a cleansing agent. Now, the Federal food and drugs act provides that any product violative of its terms may be seized for confiscation, and so your Federal Food and Drug Administration reported the facts to a United States court and the court ordered the seizure of this shipment. The seizure was made. This is only one of the many actions that have been taken under the Federal food and drugs act against misbranded dentifrices. The present label on the particular toothpaste I have told you about -- for it now has a new label -- the present label does not bear any claim or any statements that the product has value for pyorrhea or for any other mouth disease. The new label is entirely free of claims of curative value.

It is, my friends, by actions such as this that the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act protects your food and drug supply.

My read-the-label subject today is dentifrices. You should read labels on tooth pastes, powders, and liquids, and, in order to be able to

read dentifrice labels intelligently, you should know the many things I am going to tell you about these preparations.

In the first place, there are many good dentifrice preparations on the market. Today, most of the principal brands are honestly labeled.

Let us enumerate all the purposes which dentifrice preparations have been alleged to serve in statements upon their labels. They have been sold as cleansing agents, for whitening or beautifying the teeth, for tooth preservation, to remove film, tartar, or mucin, to correct bad breath, to prevent tooth decay, to neutralize acidity, to harden the gums. They have been sold as having value in preventing disease because of their claimed antiseptic properties. They have been sold as preventives and cures of mouth diseases, including pyorrhea, trench mouth, Vincent's disease, etc. In other words, one or all of these merits have been claimed for various tooth-cleaning preparations.

You are about to learn the truth about such claims and alleged values of dentifrices.

Do dentifrice preparations of themselves have any value at all in the treatment of pyorrhea, trench mouth, bleeding and spongy or receding gums, or similar mouth disorders? They do not, and this is the consensus of present-day dental opinion.

Do dentifrice preparations possess any effective antiseptic properties? They do not. Their method of use makes it essentially impossible for them to be effective as antiseptics. Dentifrice preparations have little or no beneficial results as antacids. Practically none of them, by reason of any inherent qualities, prevents tooth decay. They do not permanently correct bad breath. They do not preserve the teeth.

What is left, then, for dentifrices to do? A very important job. They are simply agents for cleansing -- they improve the appearance of the teeth by helping to keep them clean. Now you have the truth. Dentifrice preparations serve one purpose and one purpose only and that is as cleansing agents.

Dentifrice preparations are composed of ingredients common in commerce. Among these ingredients are: precipitated chalk, soap, salt, baking soda, borax, magnesia, glycerine, alcohol, saccharin for sweetening, flavors and medicinal oils for taste, water, and color. Some have a medicinal taste, but that does not mean they have therapeutic merit in treatment of diseased conditions of the mouth.

No dentifrice has a real antiseptic value in destroying bacteria in the mouth. Even though they should have such an effect, it would necessarily be a very transitory one, for they are applied but briefly in the daily cleansings of the teeth.

Before your Federal Food and Drug Administration effectuated the removal of claims for antiseptic value from labels of dentifrices, some such preparations claimed antiseptic ingredients. A statement to that

effect may have read, "This preparation contains the famous antiseptic 'Whatferol.'" If you looked for the meaning of this word in a chemical dictionary you would not find it. Probably it was the manufacturer's mouth wash product. Whatever it was, it could not have any particular beneficial results in the destruction of pathogenic germs. This follows, as I have commented, because the dentifrice has such brief contact with the mouth surfaces.

As for the label claims formerly made of curative properties for acid mouth and for the horrible conditions pictured as resulting from acid mouth, none of the dentifrices making the claims were especially useful for this purpose. Some acids are normally present in all mouths, and scientists say that acid mouth does not contribute in any particular extent to tooth decay. Even if it did, the application of a dentifrice on a tooth brush twice a day would have but a very fleeting effect in the correction of the acid condition.

Now cleanliness of the teeth is a proper matter of pride to civilized persons. And the flashing beauty of white teeth is a distinct asset to any person. Dentifrices can and do contribute to our personal pride and pulchritude by cleansing the teeth. No preparation, however, will safely whiten discolored teeth suddenly. A few preparations marketed claim on their labels, and claim truthfully that they will make yellow teeth white. But some of these are dangerous, for some contain hydrochloric acid. You will use tooth-cleaning preparations containing hydrochloric acid at your peril, for the acid may injure the delicate enamel of the teeth. Unfortunately, you will not find the presence of hydrochloric acid in a preparation claiming to whiten teeth declared on the label, for such use is not covered under the caustic poison act. However, my advice to you is that you investigate the composition of a substance offered for sale as a tooth-whitening preparation before employing it. If your teeth are dark or brown, employ a cleansing dentifrice, but do not expect to find a dentifrice that will safely keep them white and pearly like those of your more fortunate neighbor.

Now, my friends, your teeth are very valuable assets to your health and pride and comfort. No one better knows this fact than those of us whose grinders have begun to play us false. We wish that we had heeded the sound advice so lavishly given nowadays to eat the proper teeth-building foods. This advice applies especially to children, and it cannot be repeated too often. By all means, too, keep your teeth clean and by all means use your favorite dentifrice to that end. But do not rely upon a dentifrice to correct disease conditions. Your dentist knows how to take care of your teeth and he knows better than any one else how to treat cases of tooth and mouth disease.

Read labels, my friends, on dentifrice preparations. Apply the rule of reason, apply knowledge, and remember that such preparations are valuable only to keep the teeth clean. Remember that dentifrices have no magic composition; they are compounded of ingredients ordinary in commerce. Remember that some products may from time to time temporarily elude the vigilance of the small staff of inspectors trying to safeguard your food and drug supplies, and reach the market misbranded with false and fraudulent claims of curative value. Remember that while the Federal food and drugs

act controls the statements made upon labels or in printed circulars accompanying the products at the time of sale; it does not control statements in advertisements not accompanying the packages. Do not expect any product to produce benefits which they cannot possibly perform. Learn to read labels --- for such a course will aid you to become intelligent buyers.

One of the principal aids in helping you to become an intelligent buyer is to discard any notion you may have of mystery about ordinary preparations. There is nothing mysterious and practically nothing new about any of the products that I have been telling you about for these many weeks. I have told you today about the ingredients which are used in tooth pastes. In other talks I have told you about patent medicines and literally scores of food products. I have acquainted you with the way to calculate values of products in different sizes of packages, by inspecting the net weight or volume statement on the label and comparing prices per unit. You can learn enough about food and drug products to permit you rather accurately to appraise their merits and their limitations. I am your Government representative. It is part of my job to teach you how to read labels. For 20 years now, the Food and Drug Administration has been formulating precise, scientific standards for food and drug products to guide you in your buying, and has, with the cooperation of the honest overwhelming majority of the food and drug trades and of the long arm of the law brought manufacturers sending goods in interstate commerce to make the products conform to these standards, and the labels to tell wherein they depart from the standards. You need to know the standards so that you may know what the labels mean.

So that you may learn these standards, the administration has accepted the invitation of the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations to present my talks to you. I hope that you and the honest, reputable manufacturers who comprise the great majority of the food and drug trades will gain from this effort. The way for you to get the maximum benefit from it is really to study and learn the standards. I cannot teach them to you by these radio talks. You can learn them for yourself, and to your profit by sending today for copies of this talk and of the 48 preceding ones. They tell you what the standards are and what the statements on labels of different classes of products mean in relation to the standards.

If you wish to put your effort into learning label reading principles, send your request for copies of the talks to W. R. M. Wharton, United States Department of Agriculture, 201 Varick Street, New York City.